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OPINION

An Immoral War that Wasn't Ours

Spike Lee's Da 5 Bloods set me off

By OSCAR H BLAYTON

I get an ache in my heart every time someone who learns that I am a Vietnam veteran, says "Thank you for your service."

Even before I returned to the United States from my combat tour in Vietnam, I had decided that we were fighting an unjust war. More than 50 years later, watching Spike Lee's "Da 5 Bloods" set off my internal alarm bells, warning against African Americans blindly participating in U.S. foreign policy.

Lee's latest movie is an excellent commentary on some of the complexities of the Vietnam war for African Americans, which he boils down to a single line spoken by a central character: "We fought in an immoral war that wasn't ours... for rights that wasn't ours."

I am a big fan of Spike Lee, and Da 5 Bloods is among his best work, but the film points out how Black folk were victims of America's foreign policy while understating our complicity in it. I do not fault Lee for this because this war was too broad in its social and political ramifications to fit into a single movie. But it omits two lessons Black folk should have learned from this painful bloodbath.

First, the American War in Vietnam was an attempt to maintain white supremacy in Southeast Asia. U.S. involvement in that part of the world did not ramp up until after the Vietnamese had forced out their former colonial masters – the French.

Having abandoned Vietnam to Japanese invaders during World War II, France returned at the end of that war and demanded – with an outrageous sense of entitlement borne of white supremacy – that it be allowed to continue its rule. The bloodied and proud Vietnamese, who had engineered their own resistance to the Japanese, were having none of it.

After the Vietnamese rid themselves of the French in 1954 at the cost of many more lives, the United States – in its role as the Chicken Little of anti-communism – raised the alarm that the sky was falling. Self-proclaimed "foreign policy experts" in the United States warned that Southeast Asian countries would fall like dominos if communists were allowed to gain control of all of Vietnam. North Korea had secure-

ly established itself as a communist nation a decade earlier and foreign policy advisors in Washington reasoned that preventing the spread of communism was in America's national interest.

When we make a critical examination of Vietnam today, we see a trading partner of the United States and a respected member of the global community. We see economic and social progress under a communist government that exposes the lies of American demagogues who, foaming-at-the-mouth, protested the rise of communism.

In the late 1950s and early 1960, with Blacks being murdered with impunity and denied basic constitutional rights in America, the U.S. government chose instead to focus on the "rights" of people half a world away. But "freedom" was not what Washington was seeking to establish in Southeast Asia; it was "compliance." The U. S. wanted to bend that part of the world to its will – a world order based upon white supremacy.

If one ignores the rhetoric and examines America's actions towards Africa, Asia and South America, the evidence is clear that white supremacy has driven U.S. foreign pol-

icy throughout its post-World War II history.

Secondly, African Americans have been complicit in U.S. aggressions towards people of color around the world. Handcapped by the blindfold of anti-communist rhetoric, Black folk have too often been enablers in America's efforts to keep whiteness perched upon its global pedestal. Even those of us who knew that Washington's anti-Communist zeal made no sense, particularly as it related to Africa and South America, did not make the connection between U.S. foreign policy and white supremacy.

It was not the rise of communism that these demagogues feared; it was the loss of white privilege around the world. In the 1960s, the newly emergent African nations were being successfully oppressed by a network of political, economic and military resources that put a lid on any threat to white supremacy from the "Dark Continent." But with the rise of the People's Republic of China and the defeat of the French in Vietnam, the white supremacy lid was coming off of Asia.

Revisiting the American War in Vietnam, we see one aspect of America's attempt to

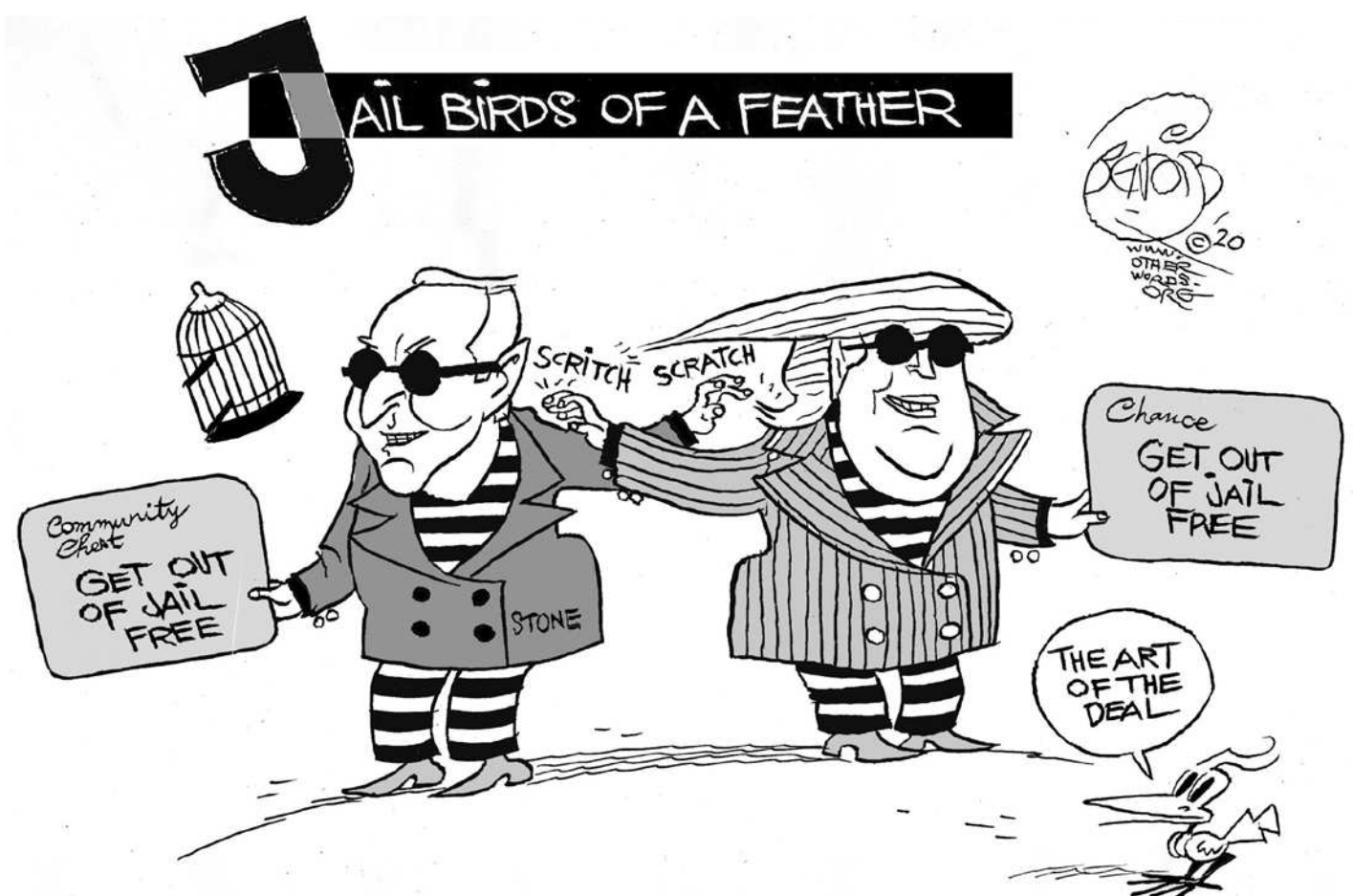
maintain global domination by white supremacy and we see our complicity in this effort. It is not enough for Black folk to plead innocence as draftees just trying to make it back to the "World" alive. We must own our part in the oppression of others.

Attempts to deny our complicity in spreading misery around the globe in support of white supremacy is not unlike Confederate sympathizers refusing to acknowledge that the underlying cause of the Civil War was the preservation of slavery, not the noble South.

As Confederate statues finally come tumbling down, African Americans are asking, "Why has it taken so long? There was no just cause. There was no noble South." By that same measure, we must ask ourselves, "What was the true cause and where was the nobility of America's involvement in Vietnam?"

Not only must we ask ourselves these questions about Vietnam, we must continue to ask these types of questions about all of America's foreign policies.

Oscar H. Blayton is a former Marine Corps combat pilot and human rights activist who practices law in Virginia.



Letter to the Editor

I share and support the outrage expressed by recent Portland demonstrations, but I am urgently moved to implore demonstrators to follow a discipline of non-violence. A first and foremost obligation of non-violent discipline is to prevent, control, and oppose activities that violate non-violent discipline.

While the spontaneity of early demon-

strations may have made non-violent discipline difficult, continuing violence is now increasingly troubling. The persistent violent outbursts, captured so well by social media and the press are inciting a backlash among deeply racist and right-wing elements and are weakening and dividing supporters.

The violence we are witnessing on the streets at night – however apologized and

justified – does nothing positive for the purposes of the demonstrations and is wholly contradictory to any standard of non-violent discipline. It's time for a conversation on methods and discipline of demonstration. If the purpose is to maximize disruption, as some have said, we won't have much conversation. But if the purpose has anything to do with winning hearts and minds, let's

talk. We should all talk.

The violence must stop. But the first ones who should stop the violence are the demonstrators themselves.

Non-violence cannot be passive bystander to violence.

Ross Danielson, northeast Portland resident, and alumnus of Clarksdale, Mississippi Jail, April 1963

Violence Hurts Cause